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ABSTRACT

The author suggests that the apparent calm at colleges and universities around the country can only be analogized to that calm which followed the active but peaceful period of the Civil Rights Movement but preceded the explosion in the nation's ghettos in 1967. The unimaginative and cavalier response of the establishment and public during the era of peaceful demonstrations is seen as having left the way open for more violent tactics. At higher educational institutions, the focus of student attacks will be the faculty and their tenure system and outmoded pedagogical technology. Lastly, the university is viewed as a meeting place for the revolution where hope for change is nurtured and from where it spreads into the larger world. The paper concludes that any "cooling off" of the campuses is superficial and that its end result may well be a more totally irrational and violent explosion. (TL)

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ALL IS NOT QUIET ON THE ACADEMIC FRONT*

by

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An Eerie Quiet

President Kingman Brewster of Yale University has recently commented that an "eerie quiet" has developed on his campus and other campuses this fall - a quiet that he cannot explain but nevertheless welcomes. A high-ranking administrator of The American University recently told me that he felt the student movement has died and students have gotten back to studying as they did in the early 1960's. This sense of the demise of student unrest is shared by many observers as they note that students are not demanding, rallying, or protesting as they have in the past two years. All is apparently quiet on the academic front.

This eerie quiet is particularly strange when only last spring at least 760 campuses - almost a third of the total number in the United States - participated in some way in the first national student strike in American history. Panty raids and fraternity parties have not drastically increased to suggest that things are back the way they were with the ungeneration of the 1950's. Then, why do we have this quiet? Are all the issues students have been raising resolved or solved? Have students simply tired of mass protest and gone underground as the Weatherman claim to have done? Or, is this the calm before the storm.

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CG 006 356

I suggest that student unrest has not ended and the eerie quiet is not to be welcomed but seen as a symptom of a potentially violent explosion. In fact, this period might be most accurately viewed as analagous to the lull between the civil rights marches and the explosions in the ghettoes across the country. A very uneasy quiet prevails but it is hardly a "back to normalcy" situation - a slush fund of frustration, rage and despair exists which may very well erupt this spring in uncontrolled, nihilistic anger. Any professor who has spent time conversing with his students knows that they have not turned to frivolity, fraternity parties and beanies, or playing frisbee on the campus quad. No indeed, the quiet is a morbid, morose quiet and the sense of impotence, meaninglessness, and despair that students spoke of two years ago still exists, perhaps with greater intensity than ever before. Today, however, the channels of group expressions of these feelings have grown closed, leadership is lacking, and rallies somehow have not greatly altered academic institutions or solved major national issues. Professors still read their dissertation notes from the 1930's, curriculum innovations have been hampered by current economic pressures and faculty resistance, and the United States is now involved in an invasion of Laos.

That there have not been massive protests on campuses because of the Laotian invasion should not be surprising to most serious observers. Prior to the May, 1970, national student strike, war-related issues were invclved in only 22 per cent of all student protests. On April 30th, the President announced that United States troops were being sent into Cambodia. Strikes and boycotts occurred at the rate of 20 a day for the following three days.

On the fourth day, four students were killed at Kent State. Strike activities then broke out at 100 or more new campuses per day for the following four days.[1] Thus, in spite of Cambodia, the Kent State deaths added the vital fuel to the fire which resulted in the national student strike. Why, then, should we expect massive demonstrations over Laos? Moreover, all the demonstrations in May, 1970, did little to stop the Cambodian invasion. This lesson was well learned...peaceful demonstrations do little to influence the Indochina War. "Violence occurred on fewer than 5 percent of the 760 campuses participating in the national student strike during the first two weeks in May. During the previous two years, an average of 23 percent of student protests led to violence."[2] If the Indochina War was not, by itself, the major cause of the 1970 strike and if relatively peaceful protests showed little influence on the War, why should we expect great activity with the invasion of Laos instead of the present quiet?

Robert Goheen, President of Princeton University, describes this quiet as somehow between disillusion bordering on despair over the failure of students to have any influence on the Indochina War.[3] The apparent apathy of students toward the Laotian invasion is not a sign that campuses have regained their equilibrium, but instead derives from a sense of profound alienation from the government and discouragemnt with both student activism

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[1] On Strike...Shut It Down: A Report on the First National Student Strike in U.S. History (Chicago, Urban Research Corporation, 1970). p. 1.

[2] Ibid. p. 2.

[3] Marquis Childs, "Students Grow More Tolerant," The Washington Post, February 15, 1971, p. A19.

and traditional political activity. By no means are they uncommitted and ready to accept what they deem to be immoral or irresponsible. Rather, their outrage is now internalized, their sense of impotence is now greater than ever before, and a festering is taking place where open bleeding cannot be seen. The critical mass of student elements has now reached the level where the catalyst of another student killing or an American troop invasion of another country in Indochina might very well trigger a total explosion without leadership or direction. It might very well be just as self-destructive in appearance as the ghetto riots were in the mid-1960's. And, co-opting the previous movements through such books as Charles Reich's The Greening of America and the State of the Union Address, suggesting that the Administration is now leading "a revolution," will only further add to the insult and despair of the students.

Furthermore, the images leaders present are now so nebulous that students cannot focus on the enemies or the heroes of their cause. Bobby Kennedy is but a memory. Eugene McCarthy is reading his poetry to the abandonment of youth. George McGovern and Edmund Muskie have not taken positive stands on many vital issues, particularly racial issues. And, Richard Nixon is so unreal that some have speculated that if he cut his finger he wouldn't bleed. Without clear leaders or enemies, students do not know how to translate their outrage into channels that might bring about meaningful change. Consequently, the anger has almost reflexively turned inward to alienation, despair and loneliness.

Stanley Karnow has commented that, "Perhaps student tempers will rise when the weather warms up. If so, the prospect that their frustrations may erupt in violence seems more plausible than the likelihood that they will play the conventional political game that, they feel, has so far yielded

them little in return."[4] Just as civil rights marches never greatly altered the situation of ghetto dwellers and therefore rage exploded in cities thorughout the country, students today have found their marches accomplishing little and options for change traditionally available yielding less.

The Academic Factory

In the United States, we have used universities as xerox machines to reproduce the status quo - they have been cultural cookie-cutters taking as their pattern white, male, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class America. I have often heard of college graduates referred to as "products" - "Myron Smith, now an IBM executive, is a product of The American University." The assumption is that the university resembles a factory which takes in homogeneous raw material and produces homogeneous products, with the B.A. Seal of Good Housekeeping.[5] We all know that human beings are not the same; they are not homogeneous raw material, yet the university strives to remove these differences.

Universities have functioned in our country to produce manpower,[6] that is to fulfill societal needs, often at the expense of manhood, or individual identities, talents, value systems and needs. The Gesellschaft society of the post industrial era dehumanizes, castrates and molds through its institutions,

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[4]Stanley Karnow, "Campus Apathy on War," The Washington Post, February 15, 1971, p. A19.

[5]See Robert Theobald, An Alternate Future for America, (Chicago: Swallow Press, Inc. 1968), p. 171.

[6]See Robert M. Hutchins, The Learning Society, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), p. viii.

including the university. To this extent, the university is but a mirror of the larger society. Students do not want to be processed and treated as products made to fulfill manpower needs. Instead, they wish to be considered as individuals who are being deliberately aided in becoming intelligent human beings by the university. Students are shouting to their society to stop programming them as tools and give them an opportunity to be independent, purposeful individuals, that is, they want to develop their manhood. The university should not be a factory mirroring the needs of a Gesellschaft society, but a beacon leading the way toward Gemeinschaft communities, where men can relate to one another as human beings. The search for individual identity and the anxiety of meaninglessness in a technological society has gone far beyond the internalized brooding of the 1950's and erupted in radical expressions of rage on the university campuses in the mid-1960's. This search has not ended today, although the mode of action which involved rallies and demonstrations may have ended. While individuals may have found temporary relief and therapy in joining the Woodstock community, the marches on Washington, and the communion of fellow students in the national strike, the underlying existential anxiety has not been eliminated or accepted. When channels were open for the expression of existential concerns, some hope was generated that change might come about. At the very least, a safety valve was found in the meeting of fellow students. Now these channels are apparently closed and existential anxiety might very well be turning to neurotic anxiety culminating in possible pathological rebellion in the near future.[7]

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[7]See Robert Lindner, Must You Conform? (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961)

At The American University the quietness overshadows a great deal of stress. The University Chaplain has reported that the office of the chaplains has had a booming business of students seeking counseling. The suicide prevention "Hotline," provided to allow potential suicidals an opportunity to "talk it over" with someone, has had a tremendous increase in use this fall, at times averaging up to nineteen and twenty calls per hour. We have had numerous cases of assaults by students on other students and bomb scares are now a weekly occurrence. A sixty thousand dollar fire, believed to be caused by an arsonist, destroyed our communications center. But, some administrators claim the campus is quiet.

If this is a healthy quiet, then the clearest analogy is the kind of quiet expressed by the psychopath before his frustrations express themselves in an uncontrolled rage or in perverted and twisted ways. It is the type of quiet found in large cities before the ghettoes exploded and drew the attention of the nation. During this period, anger was turned in upon ghetto dwellers, homocides involved neighbors and members of one's own family, drug traffic was taking a fantastic toll of young people, and the peak black male suicide rate was in the late teens and early twenties age bracket. Finally despair bent the ghetto dwellers as a willow is bent until the young tree snapped back in uncontrolled anger and violent force.[8] The campus today is a fuming volcano ready to erupt as the factory wheels continue to turn out B.A., M.A. and PhD products.

According to Dr. Calvin J. Frederick of the National Institute of Mental Health, there is a nationwide increase of young suicides.[9] This

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[8]See William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Black Rage, (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

[9]Newsweek, February 15, 1971, p. 71. Also see, "Suicide in College," Trans-action (February, 1971), p. 10.

is particularly alarming when the white suicide rate has generally peaked at middle-age. For those who would account for this phenomenon by citing increased use of drugs, studies have revealed that drugs were involved less in the suicide group than in a control group. The only other group which has a peak suicide rate higher than middle-age whites is young black males. When accounting for these statistics, some have speculated that black males sense hopelessness in acquiring their socio-economic manhood during the early adulthood period.[10] Perhaps the same is now true of young whites as well. Micheal L. Peck, Director of Youth Studies at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center attributes the rise in young suicides to a sense of hopelessness and an intense feeling of loneliness.[11] The isolation, meaninglessness and impotence of the plastic culture is no longer merely speculated about in avant-garde intellectual circles. It has now become a form of practicing existentialism by the young. But, can they tolerate existential frustration enough to prevent it from overwhelming them?

A recent Carnegie Commission study found that nearly half of the undergraduates polled and about one-third of the faculty and graduate students agree that "meaningful societal change cannot be achieved through traditional American politics."[12] Surely,then, a large number of students are not ready to seek answers through traditional party politics, especially in an age when the two parties most nearly resemble each other in platform,

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[10]See Alvin Poussaint, "Is Black Suicide On the Rise?" Essence (November, 1970), p. 8. Richard Seiden, "We're Driving Young Blacks to Suicide," Psychology Today (August, 1970); William Yancy, "Do Blacks Hate Themselves?" Trans-action (August, 1970), and Herbert Hendin, Black Suicide, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969).

[11]Ibid, Newsweek, February 15, 1971.

[12]"Study Sees Faculty Becoming Primary Target of Students," (Washington) The Evening Star, January 15, 1971, p. A2.

constituency, and leadership. If petition to the government in the form of demonstrations and protests is no longer used, what does the individual do to effect social change? If no institutionalized channels appear open, does he internalize his frustration and allow it to build into a slush fund of anger? And, when that anger erupts, will it be perverted and twisted or is it likely to be directed toward meaningful change? Viewed through these lenses, it is quite apparent that the question to be raised is not - "Are the students going to be violent?" - but, "when?" To discuss ways of suppressing this violence, [example, "getting tough" with dissenters,] is to avoid the causes of the violence. That is, suppressing violence is only treating the symptoms of frustration, and in most cases not even doing that, but merely judging the symptoms. The more important question is, "what does one have to do to bring about meaningful change in this society?"

American leaders would much rather judge the bleeding than treat the wounds inflicted on the young and minority groups. When violence erupts, it is often a form of bleeding from the psychological and even physical wounds inflicted by a racist, war-oriented, plastic society. When a man bleeds, it would be ridiculous to stand back and shout about the bleeding. When someone is cut, it is not abnormal for him to bleed. The abnormality is inflicting the cut in the first place. Yet, Nixon merely passed judgment upon his form of Reichstag burning at San Jose, when he was supposedly pelted by rocks and bottles. He did little to treat the wounds.

This tendency to "judge the bleeding rather than treat the wound"[13] can be found over and over again on college campuses as faculty and administrators ignore requests, petitions and peaceful protests until violence

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[13]See Dick Gregory, The Shadow That Scares Me (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961), p. 90.

occurs. How many newspapers today really concern themselves with student issues rather than the sensationalism of potential violence? During the Spring, 1969, American University revolt, most newspapers ceased covering the confrontation as soon as the possibility of violence was removed, yet most of the significant progress came quietly in reasoned discussions between administrators, students and faculty. Like airplanes, universities only become newsworthy when they crash. Even then more space is alloted for describing the grim details of the crash than analyzing the causes.

Definitely the era of peaceful demonstrations is over. The "men of action" have replaced the "men of words"[14] in the movement as Carl Oglesby and Tom Hayden, intellectuals who began with the civil rights marches and founded SDS, now find themselves ostracized for their mildness. Eldridge Cleaver is now regarded as a moderate by some members of the new black wave [15] and few would argue that Dr. Spock or Ralph Abernathy are leaders of the student movement today. This turn to violent action cannot be attributed solely to the movements themselves - the abdication of responsibility by decision-makers and the public to treat the issues involved seriously and imaginatively has left the way open for these stronger tactics. Stifling student protests which utilize peaceful tactics has very often closed the options available for change. Thus, the situation becomes ripe for militant action. From a purely tactical point of view, it is a lot easier to plant

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[14]Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

[15]Norman Cousins, "Reflections on a Revolution," Saturday Review (May 17, 1969), p. 22.

a bomb in a building if you wish to have the "establishment" react with violence and in turn "politicize" others, than it is to stand in the streets and have your head bashed in.

Students versus Faculty, Not Administration

Almost every administrator will admit that real power regarding curriculum change, personnel policies, admission requirements, etc., rests in the hands of the faculty. Today, students want to change these policies and procedures and become part of this decision-making process. In a survey issued by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education it was found that sixty-three percent of the undergraduates polled, compared with 39 percent of faculty, agreed that their education would improve if colleges were completely governed by students and faculty. Forty-six percent of the undergraduates, but only 20 percent of faculty members favored giving students a key role in the appointment and promotion of teachers.[16] Students are challenging the power to decide and consequently are bringing into question such concepts as tenure and the distribution of monies. These are all political questions which have been within the realm of competence of the faculty. More importantly, they affect the "rice bowls" of the faculty. That is, if courses are interdisciplinary, someone may have to be fired and some departments may not receive the money they had expected for their discipline. The mediocre professor might be fired or prodded to begin educating instead of training.

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[16] "Study Sees Faculty Becoming Primary Target of Students," (Washington) The Evening Star, January 5, 1971, p. A2.

The tenure system itself may be altered. The tenure system came about to protect professors from administrators - to allow them to vote their opinions freely without the threat of dismissal. Today it has become a form of institutionalized mediocrity. To allow student participation on decision-making bodies which "advise" administrators as to personnel policies and tenure is to remove this protective umbrella from tenured professors and, on the other hand, to save untenured professors from the threat of not receiving tenure from their colleagues.

Curriculum decisions are equally political in that knowledge is presently divided into compartments structured at least twenty years ago which are commonly referred to as departments. Each department has a faculty and a budget which it protects by stressing the purity of its particular discipline. Students today have access to information and are faced with complex problems which undermine this artificial distribution of knowledge. They know that one cannot understand psychological problems without understanding sociological structuring of society and that economics affects political decisions. Moreover, they want to apply knowledge to the world and its problems. Thus, the curriculum must become more issue-oriented and interdisciplinary. To do this, however, would be to affect the jobs of professors and budgetary structuring. Thus, resistence will be extremely high, especially during the current economic situation where most campuses are freezing hiring and even cutting back eight to ten per cent of their present faculty.

This resistence to curriculum change is especially high with the humanities and social sciences. It is much easier to develop a department

or studies in biophysics, and biochemistry than it is to develop studies in existential psychology and sociolinguistics. Yet, it is in the social sciences and humanities where most of the so-called radical students are based.

The lack of interdisciplinary educational offerings is buttressed by the preference of employers for "specialists" and not those with a so-called "well-rounded, liberal education." Again, the university mirrors the socio-economic demands of the society and provides the necessary manpower. The internal restraints of the university and the external demands of the society will allow the American educational system to train specialists to build missiles while it finds little interest in educating individuals to ask questions such as "why?" and "what effect will these missiles have on the lives of people?"

Teaching methodologies and approaches are being brought under question also. For example, the lecture system was developed in the days before the printing press, when the only method of educating was by the spoken word. Why is it that lecturing is still the major form of educating on American campuses? Even evaluation and measurement of learning is an issue. The usual way of measuring learning - the credit hour system - is based generally on one credit for each hour per week spent in a formal classroom. This is also a carry-over from the days before the printing press when man's total body of knowledge was small, advanced learning was to be had only from private tutors and the lectures of scholars. In those days, hours spent in a classroom may very well have been a valid measure of a student's effort. Today, the world is quite different as the sum of knowledge in arts and sciences increases at a pace unknown to previous generations. Books

are easily available, learning can utilize tapes, television and other audio-visual devices, and there are numerous opportunities outside the classroom and the university for research, experiential learning as opposed to didactic learning, and internships in specialized studies. Classroom hours may be an appropriate measure for progress in grade school, but they are limiting and stultify education in the contemporary university.[17]

Consequently, the new line of battle on the campus will probably be students against faculty and perhaps younger, untenured faculty against tenured faculty. The areas in which students now seek to extend their power are in the domain controlled by the faculty, not the administration. Those without union cards, the untenured, also provide a large number of dissatisfied members of the academic community who share many of the goals of students. Sixty to seventy percent of younger faculty members - under thirty years old - would be willing to consult students about the content of courses while only about one-third of the older faculty would be willing to do so.[18]

One of the most popular cliches regarding this desire of students to become involved in the decision-making process of the university is the rhetorical question, "Should the patients run the hospital?" First, this simplistic analogy is assuming the students wish to "run" the university, while only the small minority of student ideologues would ask to have total control over a university. Secondly, one can respond to this ridiculous analogy with an equally simplistic analogous question, "Can penal reform be initiated by the jailers?" The input of student opinion and judgment is crucial to change in the university and it is doubtful that significant

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[17]Vice President Donald Bowles, Letter To The Alumni of The American University, Washington, D.C., January 14, 1971.

change will be brought about through faculty initiative. The preservation of the status quo is of paramount concern to the faculty. As with a jail, students are prisoners of a rather traditional institution; they are transitory guests to be disciplined in thought by the jailers. If they perform well and conform to the expectation of the jailers, they will be released after four years. The concern of the jailers is not necessarily how effective they are in developing the talents and capabilities of the prisoners, but instead the convenience to the jailers. This analogy is even more appropriate today when students are literally forced to attend college to survive in the technological world and, in many cases, to avoid participating in a war they deem unjust and immoral.

The University Factory — Only A Meeting Place for the Revolution

Abbie Hoffman remarked at Hofstra a year or so ago that the University was but a meeting place for the revolution, and this has indeed been proven out in the past year. Violence now takes place in urban guerrilla fashion "in the streets" as we average about four bombings per day of banks, police stations, courthouses, etc. Just as workers in factories despaired of conditions in the factory and gradually came to realize that the cause of their frustrations involved the entire society, so students have moved beyond campus issues. In 1930, there were 1.5 million college students while today we have over 8.5 million from broader socio-economic, racial, and regional backgrounds than ever before. Thus, the university has become

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[18] "Study Sees Faculty Becoming Primary Target of Students," (Washington) The Evening Star, January 5, 1971, p. A2.

less of an elite institution and more a microcosm of the entire society itself.

De Tocqueville once commented that "the evils which are endured with patience so long as they are incurable, seem intolerable as soon as hope can be entertained of escaping them." Hope has been generated on the campuses and the evils of the ghetto, war, poverty and discrimination are intolerable while the mass media flaunts American affluence before the eyes of the oppressed.

Students are aware that the present economic system does not eliminate poverty, the political system does not allow for participation of all citizens, and the educational system need not rely primarily on Skinner-box teaching. For those who claim that "universities have failed, " I would counter that they certainly have not. In fact, they somehow have succeeded in making large numbers of young people aware of the possibilities for change and they have somehow created a generation of critical thinkers. But, just as the neurotic often sees reality only too clearly and does not have the healthy illusions "normals" maintain, so students refuse to accept complicity and the illusions of the system. They know that "law and order" means "we who have power will make the laws and you who do not have the power had better keep the order."[19] They know the moral duplicity of a society which uses violence traditionally to achieve its ends, yet condemns it when those out of power use violence, and they know that American institutions have been used as xerox machines to reproduce the status quo.

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[19]Louis Lomax, speech delivered at The American University, Washington, D.C., November 14, 1969.

Granted, white youths have more "options" available than blacks because they can become part of the class system. Blacks have generally been the caste within the class society. But the student revolt today is concerned with existential questions regarding the worth of life and the role of individual responsibility. Is it really worthwhile to join the business community, take part in oppressing others, lose your manhood, and make $25,000 a year?

What is happening among students is more than a revolt within the university-factory. No longer are young people merely asking for a quantitative "slice of the pie" - they are asking whether the pie is worth eating in the first place. That is, they are speaking of qualitative as well as quantitative change.[20] This is quite different than the factory revolts at the turn of the century...it is a new revolution that undermines traditional assumptions and cultural forms. And, it is exactly what the liberally-educated should be doing - critically leading the society in promoting change. The university may very well be approaching the role of beacon, and not merely mirror, of the society.

The "cooling off" of the campuses is as superficial as taking medicine to treat the symptoms of a migraine headache. The causes still exist and may be intensifying without even the relief of symptomatic expression. The previous demonstrations may have been but the froth and foam above pools of angry feelings which are daily growing deeper. This may not be a period of retreat on the academic front, but a time of strategic withdrawal for some, internalization of existential anxieties for others, and growing anger

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[20]See Kenneth Keniston, "You Have To Grow Up in Scarsdale to Know How Bad Things Really Are," The New York Times Magazine, April 27, 1969.

and despair for most. The end result of the "eerie tranquillity"[21] could very well be a more totally irrational violent explosion than any of us could imagine. Indeed, all is not quiet on the academic front.

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[21]See "The Cooling of America," Time (February 22, 1971).